

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Bobby Scott (VA-03), along with Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers (MI-14) and Representatives Steve Cohen (TN-09), Mel Watt (NC-12), Bill Delahunt (MA-10), Linda Sanchez (CA-39) and Hank Johnson (GA-04), introduced the Civil Access to Justice Act of 2009. The main purpose of this legislation is to reauthorize the Legal Services Corporation Act, which has not been reauthorized by Congress since 1977. A companion bill was introduced by Senator Tom Harkin (IA) earlier this year.

"I am pleased to introduce this bill which will, for the first time in over 30 years, reauthorize the Legal Services Corporation statute," Rep. Scott stated. "The Legal Services Corporation provides local organizations with funds to provide low-income people with legal representation. Although the program is still useful to those it serves, it needs to be reauthorized to address current needs. Over 30 years ago, I was the founding Chairman of the Board of Peninsula Legal Aid Center, Inc, so I am aware of the need for resources to make a legal services program fully operational. In this bill, we are seeking to ensure that the Legal Services Corporation has the resources required to help those in need."

The Civil Access to Justice Act makes several changes to the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) statute that will administer the program more efficiently and effectively. First, the bill increases the yearly authorization to \$750 million, which matches the amount (adjusted for inflation) appropriated in 1981, the high-water mark for LSC funding. LSC's current \$390 million appropriation is well below the amount needed to adequately fund the program.

Additionally, the bill lifts most of the restrictions placed on the program through past appropriations bills, including collecting attorneys' fees, permitting legal aid attorneys to bring class-action suits, and allowing lobbying with non-federal funds. In the spirit of compromise, the bill does maintain the prohibition on abortion related litigation and incorporates some limits on whom LSC-funded programs can represent, including prisoners challenging prison conditions and people convicted of illegal drug possession in public housing eviction proceedings. The bill also provides for more effective administration of LSC.

Overall, the Civil Access to Justice Act will ensure that those who need civil legal representation will receive them.

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